

## 芥川龍之介・英訳作品研究 : 「羅生門」

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# 芥川龍之介・英訳作品研究

——「羅生門」——

平岡敏夫

## Remarks on Akutagawa's Works

—“The Rashomon”—

**Toshio Hiraoka**

### [Introduction]

“The Rashomon”(1915) is one of representative works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke, a distinguished story-teller in modern Japan. The title of ‘Rashomon’ is very famous for the movie, the same title, by Kurosawa Akira, which won the grand prize at the 12th International Film Festival at Venice in 1951. This is the first international prize for Japanese movies. The sources of this movie are “The Rashomon” and “In a Grove”. ‘Rashomon’ means the main gate of Heian-kyo(Kyoto), the capital of Heian period (784-1192. The latter ancient period).

I already published “Remarks on Akutagawa's Works” regarding “The Tangerines” and “The Martyr”. These are based on my lecture at Dickinson College, PA, in the United States and show how I read Akutagawa's works through the text translated into English.

In my class at Dickinson College in 1987(Fall semester), I asked the students ‘Written assignments’ every time when we finished reading a story.

Their papers are very interesting because these show how

American students read Akutagawa's stories and how they responded to my lecture. I will also quote some of their opinions in this paper.

Reading my remarks and the students' opinions on "The Tangerines", Dean George Allan, professor of Dickinson College writes me "It made an interesting study in how cultural perspectives shape the understanding of a story, sometimes creatively." I exactly agree with him.

As to "The Rashomon", I was given the first opportunity (in the U.S.) to present my paper entitled "Akutagawa's 'Rashomon' as an 'Other Space'" in the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association for Asian Studies (MAR/AAS) at Lehigh University in the fall of 1987.

I wish to express my great thanks to Professor Roselee Bundy for her kindly correcting my poor English and Secretary Elaine Mellen for her kindly typing my lecture note.

The text I use here is "Rashmon and other stories" (Translated by Takashi Kojima. Introduction by Howard Hibbet. Published in Japan by the Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1952, 18th printing, 1986). I also have a lot of thanks for the translator and publisher of the text.

## RASHOMON\*

### [Text 1]

It was a chilly evening. A servant of a samurai stood under the Rashōmon, waiting for a break in the rain.

No one else was under the wide gate. On the thick column, its crimson lacquer rubbed off here and there, perched a cricket. Since the Rashōmon stands on Sujaku Avenue, a few other people at least, in sedge hat or noblemans' headgear, might have been expected to be waiting there for a break in the rain storm. But no one

was near except this man.

For the past few years the city of Kyōto had been visited by a series of calamities, earthquakes, whirlwinds, and fires, and Kyōto had been greatly devastated. Old chronicles say that broken pieces of Buddhist images and other Buddhist objects, with their lacquer, gold, or silver leaf worn off, were heaped up on roadsides to be sold as firewood. Such being the state of affairs in Kyōto, the repair of the Rashōmon was out of the question. Taking advantage of the devastation, foxes and other wild animals made their dens in the ruins of the gate, and thieves and robbers found a home there too. Eventually it became customary to bring unclaimed corpses to this gate and abandon them. After dark it was so ghostly that no one dared approach.

Flocks of crows flew in from somewhere. During the daytime these cawing birds circled round the ridgepole of the gate. When the sky overhead turned red in the afterlight of the departed sun, they looked like so many grains of sesame flung across the gate. But on that day not a crow was to be seen, perhaps because of the lateness of the hour. Here and there the stone steps, beginning to crumble, and with rank grass growing in their crevices, were dotted with the white droppings of crows. The servant, in a worn blue kimono, sat on the seventh and highest step, vacantly watching the rain. His attention was drawn to a large pimple irritating his right cheek.

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\* The "Rashomon" was the largest gate in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. It was 106 feet wide and 26 feet deep, and was topped with a ridge-pole; its stone-wall rose 75 feet high. This gate was constructed in 789 when the then capital of Japan was transferred to Kyoto. With the decline of West Kyoto, the gate fell into bad repair, cracking and crumbling in many places, and became a hideout for thieves and robbers and a place for abandoning unclaimed corpses.

**(Remark 1)**

The beginning sentence—"It was a chilly evening." It is better to say "dusk" or "nightfall" instead of "evening," according to the original. "Dusk" or "nightfall" is a shorter time than "evening." "Dusk" or "nightfall" is a boundary between the worlds of day and night.

According to my opinion, Akutagawa's stories can be called "The Tales that begin at dusk or nightfall." Its typical example is "Rashomon." The tales beginning from dusk should go into a night which will be "Other space, different from the world of day."

**(Remark 2)**

"A servant of samurai"—In the original, "of samurai" is not written." Because the story is set up in the late Heian period (about 12 c.), of which ruling classes were still noblemen or lords, not samurais. And so, the servant might be a lord's although the lords were getting weaker than samurais, the next ruling classes.

In the original, the servant is called "Genin" which means the lower class people, and as he was discharged (we know it a little later), we would call him "Genin."

**(Remark 3)**

"Rashomon"—Rashomon itself is very important to read this story. The footnote on page 3 tells of Rashomon precisely. But it should be noticed that Rashomon always had been enveloped by the old traditional legends which were mysterious and macabre. In those days, people had believed that demons or ghosts had lived in the gate. This story "Rashomon" stands on such old traditions.

Even in my childhood, my mother often told me of the Rashomon's legends, such as Watanabe-no-tsuna cut off the demon's arm.

**(Remark 4)**

"The rain"—The servant was standing under the Rashomon as it began to rain. We should notice that the author mentions both "dusk" and "rain." These are at the beginning of this story and different from the world of "day" and "fine."

**(Remark 5)**

"A cricket"—It symbolizes that no one is there. And we can remember a dragonfly in "Abe Ichizoku" (A famous historical novel, "The Abe family", 1913) by Mori Ogai.

**(Remark 6)**

"Old devastated Kyoto"—One of the most impressive parts is that broken pieces of Buddhist images and other Buddhist objects were sold as firewoods. These were holy and precious, especially with gold or silver leaves. "Worn off" is not right. Such leaves were pure and precious. In those days of Kyoto, people were looking for anything to eat. Even holy and worthy Buddhist objects were meaningless and useless for them.

**(Remark 7)**

"Flocks of crows"—The other impressive part is crows. "When the sky overhead turned red in the afterglow of the departed sun, they looked like so many grains of sesame flung across the gate." This sight is so beautiful and macabre, like a movie long shot.

**[Text 2]**

As has been said, the servant was waiting for a break in the rain. But he had no particular idea of what to do after the rain stopped. Ordinarily, of course, he would have returned to his master's house, but he had been discharged just before. The prosperity of the city of Kyōto had been rapidly declining, and he had been dismissed by his master, whom he had served many years, because of the effects of this decline. Thus, confined by the rain, he was at a loss to know where to go. And the weather had not a little to do with his depressed mood. The rain seemed unlikely to stop. He was lost in thoughts of how to make his living tomorrow, helpless incoherent thoughts protesting an inexorable fate. Aimlessly he had been listening to the pattering of the rain on the Su-jaku Avenue.

The rain, enveloping the Rashōmon, gathered strength and ca-

me down with a pelting sound that could be heard for away. Looking up, he saw a fat black cloud impale itself on the tips of the tiles jutting out from the roof of the gate.

He had little choice of means, whether fair or foul, because of his helpless circumstances. If he chose honest means, he would undoubtedly starve to death beside the wall or in the Sujaku gutter. He would be brought to this gate and thrown away like a stray dog. If he decided to steal... His mind, after making the same detour time and again, came finally to the conclusion that he would be a thief.

But doubts returned many times. Though determined that he had no choice, he was still unable to muster enough courage to justify the conclusion that he must become a thief.

After a loud fit of sneezing he got up slowly. The evening chill of Kyōto made him long for the warmth of a brazier. The wind in the evening dusk howled through the columns of the gate. The cricket which had been perched on the crimson-lacquered column was already gone.

**(Remark 1)**

"Genin"—He had been discharged several days before. The reason why he stayed in the Rashomon was that he was dismissed and expelled from the city of Kyoto. Besides it began to rain. He couldn't get another job. He had to choose another world. The world of day means the ordinary world in the city, and the world of night beginning from the dusk means another world in the Rashomon, that is the entrance to another world as well as the exit from the city of Kyoto.

**(Remark 2)**

"Genin" again—Genin had little choice of means fair or foul, starving to death or becoming a thief. He had no choice to return to the ordinary world. He couldn't choose his way and decided to spend the night in the tower over the Rashomon.

## [Text 3]

Ducking his neck, he looked around the gate, and drew up the shoulders of the blue kimono which he wore over his thin underwear. He decided to spend the night there, if he could find a secluded corner sheltered from wind and rain. He found a broad lacquered stairway leading to the tower over the gate. No one would be there, except the dead, if there were any. So, taking care that the sword at his side did not slip out of the scabbard, he set foot on the lowest step of the stairs.

A few seconds later, halfway up the stairs, he saw a movement above. Holding his breath and huddling cat-like in the middle of the broad stairs leading to the tower, he watched and waited. A light coming from the upper part of the tower shone faintly upon his right cheek. It was the cheek with the red, festering pimple visible under his stubbly whiskers. He had expected only dead people inside the tower, but he had only gone up a few steps before he noticed a fire above, about which someone was moving. He saw a dull, yellow, flickering light which made the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling glow in a ghostly way. What sort of person would be making a light in the Rashōmon... and in a storm? The unknown, the evil terrified him.

As quietly as a lizard, the servant up to the top of the steep stairs. Crouching on all fours, and stretching his neck as far as possible, he timidly peeped into the tower.

## (Remark 1)

"The stairway"—We must pay much attention to the stairway to the tower. Such a stairway was not mentioned in "The Konjaku monogatari" (The Tales of Old times, of the late Heian period, about 12 c. that the Rashomon was based on.) Akutagawa uses this stairway to make Genin advance into the tower of the Rashomon, that's to say, another world. The stairway functions at three levels.

- 1) He set foot *on the lowest step of the stairs.*



2) A few seconds later, *halfway up the stairs*, he saw a movement above. Holding his breath and huddling cat-like *in the middle of the broad stairs* leading to the tower, he watched and waited.

3) As quietly as a lizard, the servans crept up to *the top of steep stairs*.

Advancing up to the higher steps, Genin's feelings of the expectation are increasing. In the middle of the stairs, he is holding his breath and huddling cat-like, and thinking "what sort of person would be making a light in the Rashomon ... and in a storm?"

**(Remark 2)**

"In the Rashomon ... and in a storm"—In the original, "in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon" (according to my translation). This phrase is repeated later again, and so, this is so important that the narrator emphasizes the macabre atmosphere of the Rashomonn in the rainy night.

**(Remark 3)**

"The unknown, the evil terrified him"—This is a good translation, I believe. Genin is facing toward the unknown, just like the devil (It's better than "evil") or demon.

**(Remark 4)**

"On the top of stairs"—It is translated as "Crouching on all fours, and stretching his neck as far as possible, he timidly peeped into the tower." But "crouching on all fours" is not an accurate translation. That's "crouching his body as low as possible" in the original.

"Crouching his body as low as possible" shows his fear, and "stcetching his neck as far as possible" shows his curiosity. These can be called "ambivalent feelings." In my essay on "Rashomon," I've called such pose of Genin "the pose of expectation," and quoted Eliade's "Image and Symbol" concerning the "stairway" or "ladder." Now, Genin is approaching another space.

## [Text 4]

As rumor had said, he found several corpses strewn carelessly about the floor. Since the glow of the light was feeble, he could not count the number. He could only see that some were naked and others clothed. Some of them were women, and all were lolling on the floor with their mouths open or their arms outstretched showing no more signs of life than so many clay dolls. One would doubt that they had ever been alive, so eternally silent they were. Their shoulders, breasts, and torsos stood out in the dim light; other parts vanished in shadow. The offensive smell of these decomposed corpses brought his hand to his nose.

The next moment his hand dropped and he stared. He caught sight of a ghoulish form bent over a corpse. It seemed to be an old woman, gaunt, gray-haired, and nunnish in appearance. With a pine torch in her right hand, she was peeping into the face of a corpse which had long black hair.

Seized more with horror than curiosity, he even forgot to breathe for a time. He felt the hair of his head and body stand on end. As he watched, terrified, she wedged the torch between two floor boards and, laying hands on the head of the corpse, began to pull out the long hairs one by one, as a monkey kills the lice of her young. The hair came out smoothly with the movement of her hands.

## (Remark 1)

"Corpses"—They are described in various poses. Akutagawa said this sight was based on the real corpses that he had observed at the hospital of Tokyo University of which he was a student.

We can imagine the sight of the devastated Rashomon in those days. But the sight is not so macabre for us as well as for Genin, as he had known of the corpses abandoned here before.

## (Remark 2)

"The next moment..."—The next moment his hand dropped and he stared because he was so shocked at the sight of a ghoulish form

bent over a corpse that he lost his sense of smell.

"It seemed to be an old woman, gaunt, gray-haired, and nun-nish in appearance" should be replaced with "It was an old, short, gaunt and gray-haired woman just like a monkey, wearing a black-brown colored (the color of Japanese cypress skin) Kimono," according to the original. Remark that the old woman is modified by five adjective words. The narrator emphasizes how the old woman is ghoulish.

This was a horrible sight for Genin. Remember that Akutagawa wrote "what sort of person would be making a light in the Rashomon... and in a storm (in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon—my translation)? The unknown, the evil terrified him."

### Remark 3)

"Genin's feelings"—The most important remark is Genin's feelings, horror and curiosity. Here, it's written "Seized more with horror than curiosity, he even forgot to breathe for a time. He felt the hair of his head and body stand on end."

In the original, it is written that horror is sixty percent and curiosity is forty percent. But, as I've already explained, these should be called "ambivalent feelings." When he had felt so, he had been taking "the pose of expectation," which I named.

Here, I will excerpt "Image and Symbols" by Mircea Eliade (Translated by Philip Mairet).

As we have just seen, the ladder can carry an extremely rich symbolism without ceasing to be perfectly coherent. *It gives plastic expression to the break through the planes necessitated by the passage from one mode of being to another*, by placing us at the cosmological point *where communication between Heaven, Earth and Hell becomes possible*. That is why the stairway and the ladder play so considerable a part in the rites and the myths of initiation, as well as in funerary rituals, not to mention the rites

of royal or sacerdotal enthronement or those of marriage. But we also know that the symbolism of climbing-up and of stairs recurs often enough in psychoanalytic literature, an indication that it belongs to the archaic content of the human psyche and is not a "historical" creation, not an innovation dating from a certain historical moment.\_\_\_\_\_

We now know why the idea of fear, for Julien Green, was associated with the image of a staircase, and why all the dramatic events he described in his works—love, death, or crime—happened upon a staircase. The act of climbing or ascending symbolises *the way towards the absolute reality*; and to the profane consciousness, the approach towards that reality arouses an ambivalent feeling of fear and of joy of attraction and repulsion, etc.

We can also find many 'staircases or 'ladders' in Akutagawa's works. Above underlined part is equivalent to the line, "Seized with fear of sixty percent and curiosity of fourty percent, he even forgot to breathe for a time." It was so difficult to express the ambivalent feeling on the top of stairs for Akutagawa that he had to express it by percentage. "Seized more horror than curiosity" in the text (translation) might not be so wrong, but it is different from the expression for the ambivalent feeling.

(Remark 4)

"His expectation"—His expectation might have reached its ultimate level when he seized with horror and curiosity and even forgot to breathe for a time, and felt the hair of his head and body stand on end. But his expectation would have failed, because the old woman began to pull out the long hair one by one. See the following.

[Text 5]

As the hair came out, fear faded from his heart, and his hatred toward the old woman mounted. It grew beyond hatred, becom-

ing a consuming antipathy against all evil. At this instant if anyone had brought up the question of whether he would starve to death or become a thief—the question which had occurred to him a little while ago—he would not have hesitated to choose death. His hatred toward evil flared up like the piece of pine wood which the old woman had stuck in the floor.

He did not know why she pulled out the hair of the dead. Accordingly, he did not know whether her case was to be put down as good or bad. But in his eyes, pulling out the hair of the dead in the Rashomon on this stormy night was an unpardonable crime. Of course it never entered his mind that a little while ago he had thought of becoming a thief.

Then, summoning strength into his legs, he rose from the stairs and strode, hand on sword, right in front of the old creature. The hag turned, terror in her eyes, and sprang up from the floor, trembling. For a small moment she paused, poised there, then lunged for the stairs with a shriek.

**(Remark 1)**

“As the hair came out, fear faded...”—Why as the hair came out, did his fear fade from his heart? And did his hatred toward the old woman mount? These problems must be connected with the following.

**(Remark 2)**

“Pulling out the hair of dead in the Rashomon on this stormy night was an unpardonable crime.”—Why was it so in his eyes although “he did not know why she pulled out the hair of the dead. Accordingly, he did not know whether her case was to be put down as good or bad.”?

The only reason as far as written, is (1) “*in the Rashomon on this stormy night*,” which was also written before as the following: “What sort of person would be making a light (2) *in the Rashomon... and in a storm?* The unknown, the evil terrified him.” (1) and (2) are a little different, but in the original, these are literally the

same (of which my translation is "in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon). Let's compare two sentences including the same phrases. A. What sort of person would be making a light *in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon*? The unknown, the devil (not evil) terrified him. B. Pulling out the hair of the dead *in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon* was unpardonable crime.

Although two phrases (italics) are the same, sentences (A & B) are different. What is the difference between A and B?

"The unknown, the devil" in A has changed into only a woman, who is pulling out the hair of the dead in B. It must be natural that as the hair came out, fear faded from his heart.

Pulling out the hair of the dead is not only suitable but also an unpardonable crime in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon in his eyes. Because this is an ordinary people's action, not that of the unknown, the devil.

As you have already known, the Rashomon has been enveloped by the old traditional legends. And then, the unknown, the devil or demon might have lived there. Besides, it has become night and raining. And so, Genin thought "in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon."

Genin's expectation was betrayed by the old woman whose action had unveiled the unknown, the devil was a mere old woman, who was trembling in terror. Then the next problem must be the meaning of pulling out the hair of the dead.

[Text 6]

"Wretch! Where are you going?" he shouted, barring the way of the trembling hag who tried to scurry past him. Still she attempted to claw her way by. He pushed her back to prevent her... they struggled, fell among the corpses, and grappled there. The issue was never in doubt. In a moment he had her by the arm, twisted it, and forced her down to the floor. Her arms were all skin and bones, and there was no more flesh on them than on the shanks of

a chicken. No sooner was she on the floor than he drew his sword and thrust the silver-white blade before her very nose. She was silent. She trembled as if in a fit, and her eyes were open so wide that they were almost out of their sockets, and breath come in hoarse gasps. The life of this wretch was his now. This thought cooled his boiling anger and brought a calm pride and satisfaction. He looked down at her, and said in a somewhat calmer voice:

"Look here, I'm not an officer of the High Police Commissioner. I'm a stranger who happened to pass by this gate. I won't bind you do anything against you, but you must tell me what you're doing up here."

Then the old woman opened her eyes still wider, and gazed at his face intently with the sharp red eyes of a bird of prey. She moved her lips, which were wrinkled into her nose, as though she were chewing something. Her pointed Adam's apple moved in her thin throat. Then a panting sound like the cawing of a crow came from her throat:

"I pull the hair... I pull out the hair... to make a wig." Her answer banished all unknown from their encounter and brought disappointment. Suddenly she was only a trembling old woman there at his feet. A ghoul no longer: only hag who makes wigs from the hair of the dead—to sell, for scraps of food. A cold contempt seized him. Fear left his heart, and his former hatred entered. These feelings must have been sensed by the other. The old creature, still clutching the hair she had pulled off the corpse, mumbled out these words in her harsh broken voice:

"Indeed, making wigs out of the hair of the dead may seem a great evil to you, but these that are here deserve no better. This woman, whose beautiful black hair I was pulling, used to sell cut and dried snake flesh at the guard barracks, saying that it was dried fish. If she hadn't died of the plague, she'd be selling it now. The guards liked to buy from her, and used to say her fish was tasty. What she did couldn't be wrong, because if she hadn't,

she would have starved to death. There was no other choice. If she knew I had to do this in order to live, she probably wouldn't care."

**(Remark 1)**

"The feeling of Genin when he heard her answer to make a wig."—The translator in this part adds some explanations to the original. It is "Her answer banished all unknown from their encounter and brought disappointment. Suddenly she was only a trembling old woman there at his feet. A ghoul no longer: only a hag who makes wigs from the hair of the dead—to sell, for scraps of food... Fear left his heart."

The original above is only "Genin was disappointed at her answer because it was unexpectedly very common. And soon, his former hatred returned to his heart with a cold contempt." The explanation which the translator adds, shows how he read this part. And I agree with his reading in this part. The translator's explanation has five points.

- (1) Her answer banished all unknown...
- (2) She was only a trembling old woman...
- (3) A ghoul no longer.
- (4) Only a hag who makes wigs from the hair of the dead...
- (5) Fear left his heart.

**(Remark 2)**

"The logic of the old woman"—She said that if she hadn't pulled out the hair of the dead to make wigs for scraps of food, she would have starved to death, pointing to the example of the woman whose hair she was pulling out.

This logic means that she is only an old woman. Her logic is to live in the world of day as a common person, Genin was expecting horror and curiosity, expecting to face toward the unknown, the devil at the top of stairs and feeling the hair of his head stand on end.

But now, he recognized that she was a common person becau-



se of her logic. She shouldn't be in such a rainy night and in such a place as Rashomon where the unknown, the devil or the demon might appear. The old woman betrayed Genin's expectation.

[Text 7]

He sheathed his sword, and, with his left hand on its hilt, he listened to her meditatively. His right hand touched the big pimple on his cheek. As he listened, a certain courage was born in his heart—the courage which he had not had when he sat under the gate a little ago. A strange power was driving him in the opposite direction of the courage which he had had when he seized the old woman. No longer did he wonder whether he should starve to death or become a thief. Starvation was so far from his mind that it was the last thing that would have entered it.

"Are you sure?" he asked in a mocking tone, when she finished talking. He took his right hand from his pimple, and, bending forward, seized her by the neck and said sharply:

"Then it's right if I rob you. I'd starve if I didn't."

(Remark 1)

"Meditatively"—We pay a little attention to this adverb. In the original, it should be translated "coldly." He is listening to her talk coldly, touching the big pimple on his cheek, because he had a cold contempt of her and never sympathized with her logic.

(Remark 2)

"The reason why he stole her clothes."—He used only her logic itself for his robbery, but he didn't believe her logic. He said that "Then it's right if I rob you. I'd starve if I didn't."

In "The konjaku - monogatari" on which "Rashomon" is based, Genin stole the hair which the old woman had pulled out and the clothes of the dead, besides her clothes. It must be natural for Genin to steal them, all of valuable things, in order to live. But in the case of "Rashomon," Genin stole only the old woman's clothes. And so, tearing her clothes must be a symbolic action.

## [Text 8]

He tore her clothes from her body and kicked her roughly down on the corpses as she struggled and tried to clutch his leg. Five steps, and he was at the top of the stairs. The yellow clothes he had wrested off were under his arm, and in a twinkling he had rushed down the steep stairs into the abyss of night. The thunder of his descending steps pounded in the hollow tower, and then it was quiet.

Shortly after that the hag raised up her body from the corpses. Grumbling and groaning, she crawled to the top stair by the still flickering torchlight, and through the gray hair which hung over her face, she peered down to the last stair in the torch light.

Beyond this was only darkness... unknowing and unknown.

## (Remark 1)

"The meaning of tearing her clothes, again."

1) Tearing her logic of the world of day. She was naked and not going to pull out anyone's hair anymore, as it is written.

2) Becoming a real robber consciously is different from the old woman's excuse which belongs to the logic of the world of day. A real robber doesn't belong to the world of day but the world of night.

## (Remark 2)

"Their struggle or confrontation"—The struggle between Genin and the old woman means the confrontation between the world of night and the world of day.

## (Remark 3)

"He had rushed down the steep stairs into the abyss of night."—This stairway is not that from the world of night to the world of day. This is the stairway to the abyss of night. Another space of night in the tower was enlarged to the abyss of night.

## (Remark 4)

"The thunder of his descending steps pounded in the hollow tower, and then it was quiet."—This sentence is not written in the

original. This addition might be well-done, but I think that such a sound-effect is not suitable in the symbolic expression such as the abyss of night.

**(Remark 5)**

"The last sentence"—In the original, this is "Beyond this was only darkness just as black as in a cave. No one knew where Genin had gone" (according to my translation).

**(Remark 6)**

"The old woman after being stripped of her clothes."—Now she was naked and she was not going to pull out the hair of the dead. And so, she already might have come to belong to the world of night.

Her peeping pose from the top of stairs reminded us of Genin's pose peeping into the tower. They were both peeping into the night. At the end, it was darker than had been earlier for Genin, just like the abyss of night.

**(Remark 7)**

"The darkness, just as black as in a cave"—Akutagawa writes of the only darkness, just as black as in a cave, or the Rashomon on this stormy night through the eyes of the hag at the end. Where Genin had gone was unknown. There was only darkness just as black as in a cave. This is truly the space of night.

**[My Conclusion]**

Akutagawa succeeds thus in accomplishing, through the process of its confrontation with the logic of the world of day, the other space of night, the space of literature.

When Akutagawa committed suicide at thirty-five years old in 1927, he wrote an essay like confession or a story, "The Life of A Fool", in which we can find an famous passage, such as "Life is less precious than even a line of Baudelaire."

Now, we can replace "Life" to "The world of day" and "A line of Baudelaire" to "The world of night or Literature".

We may say that Akutagawa's early representative work, "The Rashomon" predicts his last or the whole of him.

[Students' opinions and My comments]

(1) On the first sentence and the beginning——

Nick Bates; (Quoted in full)

The introductory sentence of *Rashomon* is very important. This being a short story, every phrase and sentence must carefully be manipulated by the author in order to create a certain effect, for space is limited. The first sentence serves to set the mood and context in which the story will be related.

The precise translation of the first sentence from the original is: "It was nightfall". This is important for two reasons. First, it clues in the reader to the setting for which the story will begin. Secondly, the context of this statement introduces a concept that Akutagawa will draw upon and develop throughout the story. Nightfall is the boundary between day and night, two spheres of life as we have come to be accustomed. Each sphere has its own characteristics which lie beneath the obvious; that is, the difference between the quantity of light that is present. The sphere of night has its own inhabitants: thieves, unemployed, confused, and the deranged. The sphere of day is usually associated with the sociologically accepted, those that have regular jobs, family, and in society's view, those that are of worth. The story begins at the boundary, between the world of day and the world of night. The reader finds this uncomfortable, it is an unstable position being at this boundary, one that leads to anxiety. This concept is crucial in understanding the state of mind of the main character, Genin. He, too, finds himself at this boundary, no longer employed, and resting unsteadily between the world of day and the world of night.

The author introduces this concept before we even see Genin. In this way the reader has a feeling of what Genin is going thru before he is introduced, so that we see Genin the way Akutagawa

wants him to be seen. This is the result of the authors craft, the effect that Akutagawa wanted to produce.

The translation of the book the class is reading has for its first sentence: "It was a chilly evening." This sets the story off in the world of night, which is incorrect. Translated as such, the concept of the boundary between the two spheres of life, the position which Genin finds himself, is lost. As it has been stated, such a concept is very important.

The flock of crows, which is introduced immediately before Genin, adds to the mood of the story. It produces another effect on the reader, one that the author feels is necessary in understanding his message. Generally crows carry with them negative associations. They are a sign of death, scavengers unwilling to leave the dead alone, and the predecessors of evil omens. There in Kyoto a group of crows may mark the time and place of a recent death. Given the economic state of affairs in Kyoto at the time, such occurrences must have been common. It would be understandable, then, that the sight of such crows would elicit anger in the people, a cry of frustration over their inability to change and improve their standard of living. Akutagawa has the crows fly overhead in the beginning of the story; that is, at dusk. Therefore, they are flying through the backdrop of the setting sun, a sight which had to have been a beautiful one. The effect of this would be an ambivalent feeling. On the one hand, it would be a picturesque scene, while on the other, hatred brews in the knowledge of what the flock of crows symbolize. This feeling is used a number of times by the author *Rashomon*. No doubt Genin is experiencing this ambivalent feeling at the opening of the story. After introducing this concept, Akutagawa is ready to present the main character.

(My comment on Nick's)—Your understanding and appreciation of the beginning of this story is excellent and nearly perfect, I think. I am impressed your discovery to find the ambivalent feeling even in the depiction of crows. Every body knows that

crows carry negative associations and their flying scene is very beautiful in this story. But, nobody calls them the ambivalent feeling, which related to Genin's feeling.

(2) **'My very first taste of Japanese literature' —**

**Sean Pickard:**(Quoted in full)

The short story "Rashomon", by Ryunosuke Akutagawa was my very first taste of Japanese literature. While I definitely feel that, at least in the case of "Rashomon", it is very different from American or even Western literature. It is simple in style and expression, yet rich in imagery and descriptiveness.

The three remarks that I chose to discuss from the story were particularly striking for me. They are not necessarily the most important remarks on the piece but they definitely meant the most to me.

First of all, the remark concerning the "cricket". I felt that this was an excellent way of portraying the absolute desolation of Rashomon. I also saw it as an indication of the deep thought and stillness of Genin. What it struck me as most however, was a parallel of Genin. It imitated Genin in his perching on the steps of Rashomon. It is perhaps not an extremely important example of imagery but definitely an interesting one.

Secondly, the use of the stairs leading to the upper Rashomon or "world of dark" was brilliant. Genin climbed with growing anticipation of some supernatural demon, only to be disappointed by a very petty and contemptuous human evil. The use of the stairway is universal in literature but Akutagawa uses it especially well.

Overall Akutagawa's symbolism comes across, but unfortunately because of the necessity of translation some of his more subtle points were lost.

(**My comment on Sean's**)—I am very interested in your remark on the 'cricket', which imitated Genin. Besides, you point out that Akutagawa uses 'staircase' especially well. According to

your opinion, Japanese literature is simple in style and expression, yet rich in imagery and descriptiveness, commparing with American or western literature. Through your remarks, we might agree with your opinion.

(3) **On the pimple—Mike Piker; (Quoted in full)**

1. The translator's use of awkward language can be seen through out the text. For example, (Page 26—Line 5 from bottom) "Such being the state of affairs in Kyoto. the repair of the Rashomon was out of the question,"(Text 1). This is a good illustration of awkward translation. Might we say, "Due to the harsh climate in Kyoto, repairs on the Rashomon were put off indefinitely." My passage I believe, fits the prose better than what the translator used. His sentence is ambiguous and does not blend well with the overall paragraph.

2. An important symbolic passage that was over looked I think, can be found on page 29 and page 33. The symbolism I am referring to is the red pimple in the story. For example, on page 29. "It was the cheek with the red, festering pimple visible under his stubbly whiskers," (Text 3). Here is the first important allusion to the pimple as a device for Genin's courage. Whenever there is a reference to it, the main character is about to embark upon a courageous act. In this particular example, Genin was making his way up the Rashomon stairway into the world of night. This took a lot of courage to do... Later on in the story, (Page 33) after Genin has discovered the old woman stealing hair, the text reads. "His right hand touched the big pimple on his cheek." This action gave him courage to stand up to the woman and not pity her horrendous action On the same page, it reads: "He took his right hand from his pimple, and bending forward. seized her by the neck." (Text 7). Once the took his hand away from his pimple, he set about doing the act he intended. He would later steal from the woman who was stealing herself. The pimple removed the moral barrier that Genin had to the act of stealing. It allowed him to express

the true feelings he had inside. In a sense, the red festering pimple was a means to an end.

(My comment on Mike's)——In my class, although I didn't talk of the pimple on the cheek of Genin, you remark it as usually you pay much attention to words. Japanese scholars have already remarked on the pimple, but, I think no one has pointed out that the pimple removed the moral barrier.

(4) 'The world of day and the world of night'——

Rodney Huff: (Quoted in full)

*Rashomon* is a tale about a Genin who is faced with the decision of whether to remain honest or to become a thief. The Genin, who was forced to leave the city of Kyoto after being dismissed from his work, goes to a gate named Rashomon to make his decision. It is here where the entire story takes place.

At the opening of the story the Genin arrived at Rashomon at dusk. This is symbolic toward's the Genin's impending decision in two different ways. First, dusk, which is the short period of time between daytime and nighttime, helps portray the ambivalent feelings that the Genin is experiencing. The fact that the Genin is making his decision under the gate is the second of these symbols. Rashomon, the border between the outside world and the city of Kyoto, again expresses the contradictory feelings of the Genin. Both dusk and the gate are types of borders, one between day and night and the other between the city of Kyoto and the outside world. The border that is actually signified by these two is the one between the world of day and the world of night. The world of day represents the world of the common people who are honest and good. They spend their lives working during the day while using the nighttime for sleep and relaxation. The world of night is where the evil thieves and robbers live. They spend their nights stealing from the good and honest people. The Genin must choose between the ambivalent worlds of day and night.

The Genin eventually chooses to live in the world of night. He



feels that crime is the only way to obtain enough money to buy food. Akutagawa uses the symbols of the time of day, dusk, and the gate, Rashomon, to portray the ambivalent feelings of the Genin. Due to the difficulty in translation between Japanese and English, some of Akutagawa's most crucial symbols are lost.

(**My comment on Rodney's**)—Your opinion is very clear. I can appreciate your effort to understand my lecture. You write about 'dusk' as a boundary between the world of day and night very well. There is, however, a crucial problem in your understanding of two worlds.

You write "The world of day represents the world of the common people who are honest and good....." and in the world of night, the evil thieves spend their night stealing from the good and honest people. Actually speaking, in the United States, in Japan and anywhere, the worlds of day and night run as you say. But we are learning how the world of night that begins at dusk attracts us. The world of literature is not only different from the real world, but also often against the moral in the real world. Of course, you know about that. I wonder, however, American people apt to consider the world of literature on the same level with the real world more than Japanese people do, because of the traditional puritanism (I have written about such a problem in the remark on "The Tangerines")

(5) **'From the known to the unknown'**—

**Kimberly Harrison:** (Quoted in full)

In the story "Rashomon," by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, one recurring theme throughout the piece is "the unknown." More specifically, through many devices, Akutagawa alludes to a change from the known to the unknown; from a concrete world to a world of ambiguity. This can be seen in the setting of the story, in the symbolism of the Rashomon itself, and in the staircase of the Rashomon.

In the English translation of "Rashomon," the story begins in

the evening. However, this is not accurate for in the original Akutagawa intends the setting to be dusk or nightfall. This original meaning is important because it is a significantly shorter period of time than evening. More importantly, dusk or nightfall alludes to a change from the comfortable, known, world of light to a world which is dark, mysterious, and unknown. This setting gives the story a feeling of suspense from the outset; the reader has an expectation that something "evil" is lurking. Furthermore, the fact that it is "raining" and "chilly" creates an added sense of mystery in what the world of night holds for the characters in the story.

The Rashomon, the main gate to the ancient city of Kyoto, is another vehicle which Akutagawa employs to illustrate this theme of the unknown. Genji, who is the main character in the story, finds refuge in the ancient gate after being dismissed from his master's house. Genji is unemployed, and thus, is forced to leave Kyoto for another world. The Rashomon is very significant in Genji's case because he must traverse it to leave Kyoto. Symbolically, the ancient gate represents an entrance into another world outside of Kyoto -- to a world that is unknown to Genji. As in the setting of the story at dusk, the Rashomon also infers a transformation from the known to the unknown.

The staircase in the Rashomon is another device in the story which illustrates this theme of the unknown. When Genji arrives at the ancient gate he observes a light in the upper tower. He wonders "what sort of person would be making such a light? (Text 3)." His curiosity lures him to ascend the staircase to the upper levels of the Rashomon to find the answer. With each step Genji's expectation increases. The staircase is the vehicle which transports Genji to what lies unknown to him at the top of the stairs. Because of this image, one can compare the staircase to the story's setting at dusk, and to the significance of the Rashomon itself. All three are devices which Akutagawa utilizes to illustrate a transportation or entrance into another world; a world which is full of

mystery and ambiguity.

In conclusion, Akutagawa is very effective in his use of imagery. In using vehicles such as dusk, the Rashomon, and the staircase he successfully conveys an atmosphere of mystery and suspense in the story. The reader is able to sense the ambiguity of dusk, he is able to sympathize with Genin's uncertain future, and he can feel Genin's mounting expectation as he climbs the staircase to what is unknown to him at the top of the stairs.

(My comment on Kimberly's)—You understand "Rashomon" very accurately. I appreciate your paper so much. It is very good to see 'From the known to the unknown' through the Rashomon and dusk as a boundary, and through the staircase. You succeed to catch the world of night with mystery and suspense around the Rashomon.

[ "The Rashomon"—The end.]